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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 005312

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SUBJECT: MEXICO'S GOVERNMENT, MEDIA PROCESS AMBASSADOR'S  
MESSAGE ON VIOLENCE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANTONIO O. GARZA, REASONS: 1.4(B/D).

11. (SBU) Summary: While certainly not uniformly laudatory, public and private responses to last week's consular announcement and ambassadorial statement on rising border violence have so far been measured. The statements generated predictable criticism from some quarters that we have impinged on Mexico's sovereignty, and some senior Embassy contacts questioned their timing during a politically sensitive period. However, most here accept the reasoning behind our public response to rising violence. In fact our timing proved to be fortuitous as Mexico's preoccupation with Independence Day events tempered the immediate reaction. Extensive coverage of the Ambassador's weekend note expressing appreciation to the GOM for the Arellano Felix extradition has fed into a public discussion of the bilateral law enforcement relationship and violence in general. In sum, the Embassy has been able to put down a marker while so far avoiding the kind of intense polemics that may have distorted our message. End Summary

12. (SBU) Official public reaction has been defensive. The day after release, Presidential spokesman Ruben Aguilar said the Mexican government was committed to addressing growing violence here and that Ambassador Garza had acknowledged this in his statement. He said the president had instructed appropriate agencies to look closely at our concerns. Queried on radio on September 15, Secretary of Government Abascal replied that the Mexican government would look into the issue, but that it demanded "precise facts and greater clarity." He opined, as have GOM officials in the past, that many U.S. victims of border crime have in fact been involved in illicit activities. Later that evening, SRE produced a brief public statement questioning some of the Embassy's facts, while averring that Mexico and the U.S. share responsibility to combat transnational crime and violence. Without providing us advance notice, SRE also announced a September 21 meeting on violence between senior law

enforcement officials from both countries. (Comment: a Diplomatic Note passed to Embassy officials the same evening makes the same points and calls for a September 21 meeting in Laredo, Texas. We are working with SRE to coordinate such a meeting. End Comment)

13. (C) Privately, Mexican officials had expressed skepticism that the statements would have the desired impact. When contacted by the Ambassador shortly before release, Secretary Derbez asked that we not go public and said he was disappointed that we had not consulted him before deciding to do so. The Ambassador responded that given the scope of recent violence, and the particularly brazen incident on September 12 in which 25 H visa applicants and an LPR had been kidnapped shortly after leaving our consulate in Nuevo Laredo, tortured and threatened with death, he was duty bound to raise our concerns. This quieted Derbez initially, who then asked that we not belabor the point in repeated public messages. By Monday, September 18, Derbez was on the news calling the Ambassador's statements "unfortunate." When told of our intention to voice our concerns, Minister of Public Security Medina Mora, said he understood perfectly our position, but cautioned that there might be unpredictable consequences in the political arena. Another SRE contact expressed similar concerns although agreed the situation had deteriorated and understood our desire to respond. A CISEN official told MCCA that he agreed entirely with the statements, noting that these days "even grandmothers sell drugs."

14. (U) Both print and broadcast coverage was prompt and straightforward. Most broadcasters included Ambassador Garza's statement among their lead stories beginning

MEXICO 00005312 002 OF 002

mid-evening on September 14. The following day, most papers noted the statement on their front pages and gave it ample treatment on inside pages. Left-of-center La Jornada and several broadcast outlets noted without comment that the consular announcement and statement came on the same day the House of Representatives border fence vote and as Mexico's Foreign Minister was speaking at the UN on migration issues. In a radio commentary, former Foreign Secretary Jorge Casteneda said the Ambassador's statement was detailed, correctly focussed on violence in states beyond the border areas, as well as on the limited response capability of Mexican security forces. Over the weekend, many outlets carried statements and commentary somewhat more critical of our public posture, but most maintained focus on the core problem. Televisa anchor Joaquin Lopez-Doriga, told a radio audience: "The fact is, while it irritates us that Ambassador Garza is telling us this, there's truth to what he is saying.

He's talking about anarchy in some border areas, about how murders and kidnappings of Mexican citizens -- and now Americans -- have increased. He said this has impacted the bilateral relationship and that he has pointed this out to president Fox. While the president has done something about it, there is much the remains to be done." On September 18, both centrist El Financiero and Reforma carried lengthy features linking rising violence to the impunity with which narcotics traffickers are able to operate in Mexico.

15. (U) Despite concerns over the timing, most eyes last week were on the Zocalo, and the consular announcement and Ambassador's statement came at a time when most Mexicans were nervously wondering how the drama between President Fox and ex-presidential contender Lopez Obrador would play out. In addition, Saturday's extradition of Arellano Felix provided occasion for the Ambassador to highlight common ground and laud president Fox's commitment to combating major traffickers. Most media played up the contrast between the Thursday and Sunday statements. A few, including El Financiero, argued that they were inconsistent. More generally, the Sunday statement has fed into the broader discussion of violence here and the inability of local officials to come to grips with its root causes.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: So far, our public diplomacy on Mexico's climate of violence has been successful, at least temporarily raising the profile of this issue. We have been able to articulate our concerns, and they have clearly registered among Mexican officials and public. Most important, our message has not been lost in an angry reaction by officials, pundits and public. In coming weeks, the Embassy will have opportunity to address the issue systematically with president-elect Calderon's transition team and in law enforcement fora. End Comment.

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